

# “Florida Must Take the Lead When It Comes to Sea Level Rise,” Florida Politics

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There's a joke about South Florida - there are two things you can see from space. The first is the Great Wall of China and the second is the divide between Miami-Dade and Broward Counties. Neither is really true, and more and more each day our region and our state are becoming increasingly unified. South Florida is inextricably linked by more than just our shared jokes about I-95 traffic and our Instagram-worthy winter days.

Our region has an incredibly complex flooding control system with more than a thousand miles of levees, over 700 miles of canals, and nearly 200 water control structures designed to keep us dry and protect our drinking water. We take this system for granted, but rising sea levels are challenging the usefulness of the system.

To understand how we got here, we have to look back nearly a century. The devastation of the Hurricanes of 1926 and 1928 pushed the federal government to act and the Herbert Hoover Dike around Lake Okeechobee was authorized in 1930 as a result. It took just seven years to complete the dike, and it was designed to ensure the flooding during the hurricane of 1928 (that claimed nearly 2,500 lives) never happened again.

Persistent rain caused significant flooding in 1947 and almost 90% of southeastern Florida found itself underwater. Stories during the flooding made the region seem like the Wild West, with several feet of water taking months to dissipate in some areas. Congress again acted swiftly and adopted the Central and Southern Florida Project. This created the series of canals that crisscross the region we all pass on a daily basis. Southeast Florida fixed its flooding problems, for the time being, and has not seen flooding of that magnitude since.

Hurricane Andrew in 1992, further inextricably linked Broward and Miami-Dade. Western Broward County saw swift development after parts of Miami-

Dade were decimated by the storm. And, after Hurricane Andrew, Florida came together and enacted building codes that became the gold standard for the rest of the world. The building codes enacted because of Andrew helped save lives and property during Hurricane Irma.

As with each challenge, our region has stepped up to the opportunity to become more resilient and fight for our protection. Sea level rise has brought a whole new challenge to our region and to our state. We are watching the slowest disaster movie ever recorded and we are barely past the opening credits. However, this does not diminish our need to plan and act now. Fixing our flood control system is just one piece of the big resiliency puzzle.

Resilience is a buzzword that encompasses too much sometimes, but my favorite definition is “preparing on the good days for the not-so-good days.” For our region, our greatest challenge is flooding and sea level rise.

In addition to fixing infrastructure like the flood control system, we also need to plan for the future. Palm Beach, Miami-Dade, Broward, and Monroe Counties have already come together to use a unified sea level rise curve for planning purposes - we are looking at about two feet of sea level rise by 2060, just 40 years from now.

But at its core, resilience is an economic issue. It’s about protecting property value, reducing business interruption, creating new high-paying jobs, and investing in our communities with a keen understanding of the future. We have an opportunity to be forward-thinking, fiscally responsible, and preserve our state’s greatest assets - its environment and people.

Florida has a chance to lead the world once again. We have seen great strides in just the first few weeks of the new state administration. The Governor has announced an Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection focused on sea level rise and flooding. This is a huge step in the right direction. Planning on a state and regional level makes sense and allows smaller municipalities to utilize knowledge and expertise that they may otherwise not be able to access.

Due to our limestone bedrock, a giant wall like the Great Wall of China will not keep the waters out. The water is coming from all directions, including below. We need innovative and unique solutions that will take some time to develop and deploy. But I am hopeful. As a very young child, I remember watching a rocket take off from Florida and it landed on the moon. We sent a man to the moon in less than a decade. I applaud the Governor and his leadership on this issue. I have no doubt we can and will lead the state in finding solutions.

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